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DEPT FOR EUR DAS BRYZA & EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/15/2017

TAGS: PGOV PREL GG

SUBJECT: DAS BRYZA'S NOVEMBER 13 MEETING WITH GEORGIAN DEFENSE MINISTER KEZERASHVILI

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft, reason 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Georgian Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili told EUR DAS Matthew Bryza on November 13 he was concerned about a Russian build-up of peacekeeping forces at Ochamchira in Abkhazia, calling it a clear violation of the CFE treaty. Kezerashvili said the MOD was going to share with Embassies a video showing five newly-delivered T-72 tanks, artillery equipment, and between 200-300 troops at the base. Kezerashvili added he would not share the video with media until the embassies had seen it and been given a chance to react. Kezerashvili said the Russian Peacekeeping Forces were also reinforcing checkpoints in Chkortali in South Ossetia and two checkpoints in Gali. He said he feared this build-up was preparation for a possible Russian response to the anticipated declaration of Kosovo independence.

¶2. (C) Kezerashvili also said Russian leadership was making a move during the 45-day period before the January 5 elections because the Russians perceive Saakashvili as too weak to react. He said the build-up of Russian tanks and artillery equipment are a message from Russia. He said Georgia would likely react in some way if the build-up is not stopped, but denied any plans to re-integrate Abkhazia or South Ossetia by force at this time. He felt that while Georgia's international image is suffering, the Russians might be encouraged by a muted international reaction to the build-up.

Kezerashvili emphasized he wants to send a message to Europe that Georgia only wants Russia to withdraw the new troops and equipment.

¶3. (C) Kezerashvili said he believes MAP is still possible, but it will depend on how the elections went in January. He could make no guarantee there wouldn't be another incident in Abkhazia in the meantime. DAS Bryza told the Minister he felt Georgia's chances for MAP suffered a serious blow during the latest domestic crisis, but if Georgia can restore faith in the electoral process and continue defense reforms, the United States could resume a full push for MAP for Georgia. Bryza emphasized his efforts with the Russians to avoid further incidents in Abkhazia to discourage them from sending more troops to Abkhazia. He also assured Kezerashvili that the United States is pressing the Russians to stop the "revolving door" of Russian Peacekeeping forces training Abkhaz armed forces.

¶4. (C) Deputy Defense Minister Batu Kutelia offered a readout of his briefing of the NATO allies in Brussels, saying NATO did not react negatively to the Georgian plans to add a fifth brigade to its armed forces. He said the brigade cannot be created in two months, but hoped it would be fully operational in one year, with part of it ready as early as Spring 2008.

¶5. (U) DAS Bryza has seen this message.

TEFFT